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E-Participation for Urban Development Projects
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Abstract

This thesis is concerned with the practical results of the use of electronic tools as a means of gathering public input for urban development projects. Of particular interest was the capacity of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to improve levels of public engagement in urban development, within a context of declining democratic participation throughout the developed world. To this end, a questionnaire was distributed to project leaders of urban developments in a diverse set of cities, asking them to comment on the successes and failures of the e-participation processes they experienced.

In conjunction with the relevant literature on urban development and civic engagement, the questionnaire results show both the potential and the limitations of the use of ICT tools in contemporary cities. While those surveyed were generally satisfied with the results of e-participation initiatives, noting a wider variety of contributions, they did share a common disappointment with the generally low numbers of participants. However there were reasons to be optimistic that levels of participation will improve along with improvements to methodology, and citizen habit formation.

Introduction

In recent years, it has become commonly accepted that people should be able to give their input about their cities' community planning. Urban development projects are considered as key in community building and those projects need to take into account the citizens' perspective. Participatory processes for urban development projects always have to confront several organizational challenges, including the need being as efficient as possible ensuring a diverse range of participants and interests. Traditional forms of participation might attract only a certain kind of participant thus creating a bias in the sample group. Electronic tools also only attract a certain subset of people. Is the combination of those two biases sufficient to be representative? Or, is it exactly the same kind of politically active citizens that join public consultations no matter the means?

One phenomenon that is often observed when it comes to urban planning is the “not in my backyard” syndrome; what is good for the city as a whole is not necessarily seen as good for a particular individual. Participatory planning, helped by electronic means, might help in creating a collective vision that moves beyond individuals’ resentments toward the evolution of a city. Internet is not only helpful for information sharing but it is also a great tool for interaction, networking and mobilization. Those concepts are all key in civic life.

This thesis will try to assess the effect of using electronic tools for public participation purposes in urban development projects. Beginning with a comprehensive literature review, existing ideas on e-participation from around the world will be outlined. These ideas will then be analyzed in the context of a set of real urban development projects. With information collected through a questionnaire sent to project leaders who have experience with e-participation, the impact, of electronic participation tools, positive or negative, and how they influenced the final development will be investigated. Ultimately, I aim to create a certain mapping of the problems and positive experiences encountered in order to help local authorities to prepare themselves strategically for e-participation use in their future urban development projects. I will then elaborate some recommendations for local authorities who would like to use electronic means for participatory processes in their future urban development projects.

Literature Review: Theory of e-Participation and Urban Development.

Participation

- Why participate?-

As a first step, it is primordial to understand what the participatory process is and how it relates to more general democratic processes. It is also important to understand why it is sometimes necessary in urban development projects, even mandatory in some countries. Tambouris & al. defined the perception of public participation as “an interaction between governments and citizens (G2C) having the overall aim of better

decisions that affect the life of the citizens.”¹ The importance of consultation and participation for urban development projects has been, for a long time, a topic of great interest among urban researchers. Back in 1965, Paul Davidoff highlighted the necessity to turn urban planning into a more political process: “The prospect of future planning is that of a practice which openly invites political and social values to be examined and debated. Acceptance of this position means rejection of prescriptions for planning which would have the planner act solely as a technician.”² A common belief is that governments use participatory processes as a way to get away from their responsibilities by using participation to legitimate a decision already made or blame it on the population if things go wrong in the aftermath.³ Those statements lead me to believe that a sincere political will to consult the population is needed from government officials before any participatory process is started. To go a step further from political will, there needs to be a concrete political involvement where authorities feel like the project is theirs and therefore cannot afford failure. The involvement of politicians throughout the process might demonstrate a certain level of care.

- Participation and skepticism -

Public consultations for urban development are also affected by a recent increase of general political skepticism and disaffection. As mentioned by Gibson & al, “[...] commentators have increasingly bemoaned the lack of interest in modern democracy – voter turnout is in decline, active participation in civic institutions has deteriorated, and surveys regularly report diminishing public faith in public institutions.”⁴ A general decrease in interest has also been observed by different researchers such as Bradwell and Marr who noted “Governments are generally stricken with a sense of

¹ TAMBOURIS Efthimios, LIOTAS Naoum & TARABANIS Konstantinos. *A Framework for Assessing eParticipation Projects and Tools*. Proceedings of the 40th Hawaii Conference on System Sciences. 2007

² DAVIDOFF Paul. *Advocacy and Pluralism in Planning*. Journal of the American Planning Association. November 1965 P.331

³ FELLI Romain. *Développement durable et démocratie: La participation comme problème*. Université de Lausanne. *Urbia. Les cahiers du développement urbain durable. Participation et développement urbain durable* .P. 23

⁴ GIBSON Karen, HOWARD Philip & WARD Stephen. *Social Capital, Internet Connectedness & Political Participation: A Four-Country Study*. 2000 International Political Science Association. Quebec, Canada

declining public trust and legitimacy.”⁵ The same authors also emphasized the importance of involving the public service in order to re-build the trust toward the governmental authorities. “Governments have been searching for ways in which to make the business of politics more relevant to people and it is clear that public services, through their effects on people’s everyday lives, play an important role in this endeavour.”⁶ I will discuss later how the involvement of new technologies to facilitate service-delivery in the public service has an impact on relations between citizens and governments.

Political apathy creates a big challenge in mobilizing the population and making them understand that their opinion will have a concrete impact on the final decisions. Citizens who took the time to share their opinion and provide feedback to the authorities, through an electronic or more traditional channel expect to recognize their “personal touch” in the final layout of the project. In addition to making the views and opinions of both governmental authorities and citizens known, political participation is also expected to, as mentioned by Tambouris & al, offer “the opportunity to co-formulate political decision making in certain cases.”⁷ By presenting the final project as a co-formulation, governments ensure a higher satisfaction of the population and a greater sense of civic involvement.

As discussed later in a case analysis, the city of Lausanne provides a concrete example of the lack of trust regarding the sincere intention of politicians when it comes to public participation. When the local authorities announced the use of a participatory process for their urban development project called *Metamorphose*, media and the general population were quick to criticize the process saying main decisions were already taken. This criticism likely had a direct impact on the participation level.

⁵ BRADWELL Peter & MARR Sarah, *Making the Most of Collaboration an International Survey of Public Service Co-Design*. Demos Report 23 in association with PwC’s Public Sector Research Centre. 2008 P. 45

⁶ BRADWELL Peter & MARR Sarah, *Making the Most of Collaboration an International Survey of Public Service Co-Design*. Demos Report 23 in association with PwC’s Public Sector Research Centre. 2008 P. 45

⁷ TAMBOURIS Efthimios, LIOTAS Naoum & TARABANIS Konstantinos. *A Framework for Assessing eParticipation Projects and Tools*. Proceedings of the 40th Hawaii Conference on System Sciences. 2007

- Participation and Democracy-

It is also important to understand how participation links to democracy. Even considering the factors already mentioned, and taking into consideration the fact that participatory processes are often used as tools to strengthen democracy the link between participation and democracy is not necessarily self-explanatory. One might wonder the assumption that if public administrations ask for comments and request feedback from the citizens, this automatically implies that their input will be used in a democratic manner. Nonetheless, participation should be considered as a much valuable resource to increase democracy. As mentioned by Macial and Bicharra Garcia: “[...] in order for democracy to really exist, citizens should articulate a discourse, outline proposals, discuss them and confront them with other proposals through public communication means.”⁸ Kalampokis & al. also argued about the importance of participation in the democratic process as a whole. They define the process as follow: “A *participatory process* comprises a number of *participation activities* which have to do with the specific activity of citizen engagement and involvement in the democratic process.”⁹ The same authors also emphasized of the fact that each participatory activity should have a specific scope¹⁰, thus demonstrating the importance of having a specific target public and adapting the process to this public.

The fact that so few countries use participatory democracy ending up consulting citizens once every four years under general elections has a negative effect on the democratic health and progress of some countries. This reality might be used to argue that the maturity of democracy is still quite low worldwide, even in the most developed countries. E-Participation projects often face this as a reality especially when it comes to the final evaluation of the project. As observed by Macintosh and Whyte “[...] the relatively recent realization by governments of the need to engage with citizens and therefore the evaluation of public participation is an even newer

⁸ MACIEL Cristiano & BICHARRA GARCIA Ana Cristina, *DemIL: an Online Interaction Language between Citizen and Government*. WWW 2006, P. 849

⁹ KALAMPOKIS Evangelos, TAMBOURIS Efthimios and TARABANIS Konstantinos. *A Domain Model for eParticipation*. The Third International Conference on Internet and Web Applications and Services. IEEE Computer Society. 2008 P. 27

¹⁰ KALAMPOKIS Evangelos, TAMBOURIS Efthimios and TARABANIS Konstantinos. *A Domain Model for eParticipation*. The Third International Conference on Internet and Web Applications and Services. IEEE Computer Society. 2008

concept.”¹¹ Tresman et al. also observed that: with the modernization of public administration came a whole new way of consulting citizens based on networks and with the constant challenge of budget restrictions and continuous improvement of policy outcomes.¹² Both the governmental authorities and civil society still greatly value the participatory process as they consider consultation and sharing of ideas as quite positive from the quality of the debate, the synergy created by different people discussing, and also for keeping a healthy democracy in general. As observed by Chadwick: “[...] deliberative democrats tend to argue that the views are, and ought to be, molded by our creative interactions with others. We discover legitimate solutions to political problems by engaging the deliberation.”¹³

Citizen consultations are particularly important in urban development considering the high importance and value of community building in urban planning. In recent years, researchers have observed a lack of diversity and local feel in some modern developments. As mentioned by O’Hara:

“Many have taken a cookie-cutter approach to redevelopment: one mall, one convention center, and one parking garage fits all. Rarely where a community’s specific conditions or local residents’ needs or skills taken into account, as part of the development agenda. The results have often been higher costs than benefits, as development projects have added to the under-utilization of space, to plummeting real-estate markets, to an erosion of historically grown social networks, trust and community identity.”¹⁴

These notions of social networks, trust and community identity will be of special interest later as I try to explore the relation between electronic means and participation in urban development projects.

¹¹ MACINTOSH, Ann & WHYTE, Angus. *Evaluating how Eparticipation Changes Local Democracy*. eGovernment workshop '06. Brunel University West London. September 11 2006. P.2

¹² TRESMAN Mimi, PASHER Edna & MOLINARI Francesco. *Conversing Cities: the Way Forward*. Journal of Knowledge Management Vol. 11 No. 5 2007 P.62-63

¹³ CHADWICK, Andrew. *Internet Politics. States, Citizens and New Communication Technologies*. Oxford University Press 2006 P. 86.

¹⁴ O’HARA Sabine U. *Urban Development Revisited : The Role of Neighborhood Needs and Local Participation in Urban Revitalization*. Review of Social Economy VOL. LIX No. 1 March 2001 P. 26

The Input of Electronic Means

-Technological demand-

The need to diversify participation by adding an electronic touch is a result of the challenge from mobilizing certain categories of citizens to participate in traditional public consultations. As argued by Bonnard, no matter how you prepare the process, marginalized groups will remain excluded. He also observed that foreigners, youth and elderly people are most likely to be absent from community meetings, this absence creates a major distortion from a truly democratic process as it excludes the needs and perceptions of a whole category of citizens.¹⁵ The incentive of using electronic tools to facilitate access, to be more inclusive and attract a higher number of citizens was also observed by Polat. He noted that, new technologies are also valued for facilitating political participation to certain groups who used to be penalized. People who are geographically dispersed and disabled people are two common examples.¹⁶ Difficulty of access and lack of time and/or interest are some of the factors explaining such exclusions.

The technical complexities involved in most urban development projects always made communication difficult between the different experts involved (architects, urban developers, planners, economists and others) and citizens at large. This difficult interaction and comprehension coupled with a growing interest from the large public for its surrounding environment and how it is arranged brought a real need to use technologies as a facilitator.¹⁷ This understandable communication challenge between experts and citizens also explains the growing popularity of using Information and communication technologies (ICTs) for different purposes in urban development such as three dimensions (3D) visualization. This continuous communication is, evidently, essential in the case that interests us considering that if there is no efficient way of communicating between experts and citizens to ensure that the project is really understood then any participation process becomes almost obsolete. Such a challenge

¹⁵ BONNARD Yves, *Enjeux et limites de la concertation en aménagement du territoire*. Université de Lausanne. Urbia. Les cahiers du développement urbain durable. Participation et développement urbain durable .P. 104

¹⁶ POLAT Rabia Karakaya. *The Internet and Political Participation*. Exploring the Explanatory Link. European Journal of Communication. 2005 Sage Publications. P.447

¹⁷ BRUN Philippe, *Vers une démocratisation de l'accès aux données territoriales: le cas du SIT genevois*. NTIC et territoires. Presses Polytechniques et universitaires romandes 2001. P. 231

is even greater when citizens are requested to give their input about the project as a whole. People are often more incline to react about a small change that might affect their daily life such as creating a parking spot or moving traffic lights than a major re-organization of their city or even neighborhood.

-Expectations from ICTs-

Around the mid 1990's the rise of communication technologies created enormous hopes for a better democracy. Many people believed that an easier access to information, more transparency and a wider array of information available would facilitate the communication between governments and citizens. But, as noted by Polat: "the linkages between more information and increased participation are not self-evident."¹⁸ The use of ICTs needs to be assisted by a general strategy from the administration. It was observed that "Improving the ability of representative institutions to hold executives to account depends more on structural and procedural changes, perhaps assisted by ICTs than on ICTs themselves"¹⁹ Other researches such as Mossberger et al. have claimed that the Internet brought a positive change of civic behavior, at least in the most developed countries:

"Because the use of Internet is now widespread the United States, this new medium is affecting the way in which people engage in the public sphere and their individual economic pursuits. Like education, the Internet has the ability to provide information, skills and networks that enable political and economic participation."²⁰

The same authors also claim that the increase of Internet use might have a direct and positive impact on civic participation which, as mentioned previously, has been in a serious decline over the last years. They interpret that: "While the causes of this decline in civic engagement and participation are complex, and not easily remedied by any single solution, the Internet may be a tool for enhancing citizenship in the information age."²¹

¹⁸ POLAT Rabia Karakaya. *The Internet and Political Participation*. Exploring the Explanatory Link. European Journal of Communication. 2005 Sage Publications. P.437

¹⁹ RAAB, Charles D. & BELLAMY, Christine. , *Electronic Democracy and the "mixed polity". Symbiosis or Conflict?* Electronic Democracy. Mobilisation, Organisation and Participation via New ICTs. P. 23

²⁰ MOSSBERGER Karen, TOLBERT Caroline J. and MCNEAL Ramona S., *Digital Citizenship. The Internet Society, and Participation*. The MIT Press Cambridge Massachusetts & London England. 2008 P.9.

²¹ MOSSBERGER Karen, TOLBERT Caroline J. and MCNEAL Ramona S., *Digital Citizenship. The Internet Society, and Participation*. The MIT Press Cambridge Massachusetts & London England. 2008 P.49

- ICTs and Information Processing-

It is important that administrations understand the following statement; making information available online does not, in itself, constitute good and efficient democracy. Polat noted on this topic that “The information available on the Internet needs to be processed by the user in order to have a meaning. Without such processing, information is no more than raw data.”²² Authorities need to make sure that citizens have the capacity, the resources and the tools in place to process the information. Investment in adequate infrastructures and education on ICT use are two excellent steps to take in order to give this capacity to a public as large as possible. People also rarely have a natural interest in making any effort to get the information and process it unless they are directly affected by a certain topic. A major challenge is to find a way to make ICTs a facilitator and increase participation among people who traditionally have a low interest toward political and civic involvement. A good solution to avoid this skepticism toward the use of participatory processes and facilitate citizens’ input is to involve them early in the decision-making by explaining the how and why of this decision.²³ Urban development projects tend to be spread on a quite long timeline which is a challenge in keeping people involved and interested throughout the project. It is imperative to keep in mind that literacy has a high role to play when it comes to use of information online. As observed by Mossberger et al.: “Those who have Internet connections at home may still lack the ability to find and evaluate information online, for example, because of a lack of familiarity with search strategies or even limited literacy.”²⁴ This point demonstrates the importance of pushing forward education and training strategies before turning exclusively to ICTs for information dissemination purposes. About education and training, the same authors noted that: “Increasing technology skills is clearly an educational issue for some as well as a matter of technical training or exposure to technology.”²⁵

²² POLAT, Rabia Karakaya. *The Internet and Political Participation*. Exploring the Explanatory Link. European Journal of Communication. 2005 Sage Publications. P.437

²³ WATSON, Robert T. & MUNDY Bryan., *A Strategic Perspective of Electronic Democracy*. Communications and the ACM. January 2001 P. 28

²⁴ MOSSBERGER Karen, TOLBERT Caroline J. and MCNEAL Ramona S., *Digital Citizenship. The Internet Society, and Participation*. The MIT Press Cambridge Massachusetts & London England. 2008 P.10

²⁵ MOSSBERGER Karen, TOLBERT Caroline J. and MCNEAL Ramona S., *Digital Citizenship. The Internet Society, and Participation*. The MIT Press Cambridge Massachusetts & London England. 2008 P.12

The rise of new technologies also created new expectations from citizens to have information available automatically which created almost instantly a request for more transparency from governments. Many institutions are still quite reluctant on making their documents so easily available online. Both governmental authorities and public institutions are now expected to provide complete and trustable information²⁶ and, I would add, in a timely manner. Local governments that take a long time providing basic documents such as meeting minutes on Internet are quickly criticized on the same medium, through blogs for example. Some can use those tools to pinpoint specific administrations that lag behind in displaying their public information. Before going too enthusiastically on the transparency way and starting publishing all their information online, governments should ask themselves some strategic questions such as: “Should governments actively push information out or should citizens just be able to request information? Is there any information which can rightfully be confidential and if what kind of information would that be?”²⁷

- ICTs and Political Participation-

Criticism about online political participation also comes from the perception that participants are too often already strongly politicized citizens and have strong opinions based on their affiliated political party’s official platform. It is believed that new technologies would not bring new actors on the political scene. The bias mentioned earlier about traditional forms of consultation excluding some categories of citizens might be imitated but by excluding a totally new category of potential participants. Chadwick also noted this irregularity in forums of discussion:

“Those who give feedback in deliberative forums and who contact governments with their views may be self-selected, technology-literate groups whose views and prejudices may not be representative of citizens as a whole. Indeed, the ability to use technology in the manner proposed is unevenly spread through government itself as well as civil society.”²⁸

²⁶ BRUN Philippe, *Vers une démocratisation de l'accès aux données territoriales: le cas du SIT genevois*. NTIC et territoires. Presses Polytechniques et universitaires romandes 2001. P. 231

²⁷ Pep-Net, Pan-European eParticipation Network. <http://pep-net.eu/wordpress/?p=249> December 3rd 2008.

²⁸ CHADWICK, Andrew. *Internet Politics. States, Citizens and New Communication Technologies*. Oxford University Press 2006 P. 112.

Gibson & al made some more extensive observations on that topic and about the typical strata where participants and users come from:

“The financial and cognitive skills necessary to engage with the new modes of participation may only be found within elite strata of society who already hold large amounts of social capital and participate extensively in the political system. The impact of the internet will thus lead to a reinforcement and exacerbation of existing participation bias, producing a society of informational haves and have-nots.”²⁹

This statement can serve as a warning that Internet is not necessarily a tool to facilitate access to civic involvement to a larger stratum of society but, on the opposite, it might make the gap even wider. What is commonly known as the digital divide can then lead to a democratic divide. Interestingly, in evaluating the demographics of participants to an online survey, Gibson & al. observed the same bias but noted that:

“Respondents are more likely to be male, more highly educated, younger, and more likely to be employed, although the concentrations are slightly less marked than one might expect, the US, in particular has a fairly evenly distributed sample across the various demographic and social categories.”³⁰

Individuals who take the initiative to go on websites related to their local government or politics in general are certainly more likely to participate in online consultations. This tendency might bring forward the argument that those taking part in e-participation initiatives are the same that already take part in civic life by joining political debates under whatever forum they might take place. This assumption creates a key worry in conserving a major bias in comments received thus avoiding a good representation of the general population’s opinion.

Mossberger & al. proved the relation between the consumption of political news and participation: “Individuals who consume political information online are more likely to participate in political discussions, have higher levels of political knowledge, and

²⁹ GIBSON Karen, HOWARD Philip & WARD Stephen. *Social Capital, Internet Connectedness & Political Participation: A Four-Country Study*. 2000 International Political Science Association. Quebec, Canada

³⁰ GIBSON Karen, HOWARD Philip & WARD Stephen. *Social Capital, Internet Connectedness & Political Participation: A Four-Country Study*. 2000 International Political Science Association. Quebec, Canada

have more acute political awareness, as measured by political interests.”³¹ This relation is not to be undermined for urban development purposes considering that individuals with a high political tendency are very likely to join any public debate in order to push issues that are close to their political party or interest group of attachment.

-Moderation in E-Participation-

A condemnation that is frequently mentioned in the media about online participation is related to the lack of intellectual value of the comments posted affecting the quality of the debate. Forums and chat rooms might be too often filled with worthless arguments between the same three or four people resembling more to a rage filled ideological fight than a valuable democratic debate. Either for policy development purposes or a specific urban development project, the perception is that those comments can rarely be used as a source of new concrete ideas and influence for the final project. Others argue the contrary by saying: “[...] the sometimes heated and relatively ruleless nature of online political discussion is in fact more conducive to democratic deliberation because it subverts the constraints of politeness that influence face-to-face discussion.”³² ICTs are highly valuable in creating debate but it is a challenge to guarantee that all the information shared on Internet is not only “noise” but also valuable and of high quality information.

When authorities use an electronic platform for participation or consultation purposes, they quite often utilize the argument that this will gather a higher amount of participation as people might communicate more easily when encouraged by the anonymity of the Internet. It is believed that the traditional social barriers between individuals will go down almost by magic. It has been observed that electronic medium can work as shields allowing individuals to communicate with each other without having to face the other person with whom they are interacting.³³ People should not fall so easily in that trap as researchers have also been able to demonstrate

³¹ MOSSBERGER Karen, TOLBERT Caroline J. and MCNEAL Ramona S., *Digital Citizenship. The Internet Society, and Participation*. The MIT Press Cambridge Massachusetts & London England. 2008 P.65 (Chapter with Jason McDonald)

³² CHADWICK, Andrew. *Internet Politics. States, Citizens and New Communication Technologies*. Oxford University Press 2006 P. 110.

³³ VODOZ, Luc. *Citoyenneté et territoire à l'heure des NTIC*. NTIC et territoires. Presses Polytechniques et universitaires romandes 2001. P. 249

that “anonymity in CMC [computer mediated communication] may function to reinforce boundaries between groups, rather than break them down.”³⁴ The same researchers also found out that people using electronic medium to communicate are less influenced by social boundaries when they are helped by visual identifiers such as pictures of the individuals they are interacting with.³⁵ This information would help authorities who are setting up an electronic platform for e-participation in getting more original and genuine testimonies from individuals affected by the project.

According to the Social Identity Model of Deindividuation Effects (SIDE) model: “[...] when people are able to differentiate individually each person with whom they interact electronically, they are more inclined to set themselves apart from the group and comply less with the group norms.”³⁶ Group influence can, indeed, create a major bias in the feedback collected, Postmes & al. also demonstrated that: “When communicators share a common social identity, they appear to be more susceptible to group influence, social attraction, stereotyping, gender typing and discrimination in anonymous CMC”³⁷ Taking into account those facts, it is important for website moderators to keep in mind that they need to find a way to diminish the sense of common social identity. This would have to be done without risking the negative effect of people feeling less implicated in their local community thus reducing their willingness to participate to any online consultation. Observers have also noted the risk of participants crying to censorship and lack of democracy if there is too much moderation on online platforms used for consultations. Wise & al also studied the influence of moderation on participation to online communities and one of their experiments led them to conclude that:

“[...] a moderated online community elicited greater intent to participate than an unmoderated community. Since online communities generally form around a particular topic, it makes

³⁴ POSTMES Tom, SPEARS Russel & LEA Martin. *Breaching or Building Social Boundaries? SIDE-Effects of Computer Mediated Communication*. Communication Research Vol. 25 No. 6 December 1998 P. 703

³⁵ POSTMES Tom, SPEARS Russel & LEA Martin. *Breaching or Building Social Boundaries? SIDE-Effects of Computer Mediated Communication*. Communication Research Vol. 25 No. 6 December 1998 P. 703

³⁶ POSTMES Tom, SPEARS Russel & LEA Martin. *Breaching or Building Social Boundaries? SIDE-Effects of Computer Mediated Communication*. Communication Research Vol. 25 No. 6 December 1998 P. 703

³⁷ POSTMES Tom, SPEARS Russel & LEA Martin. *Breaching or Building Social Boundaries? SIDE-Effects of Computer Mediated Communication*. Communication Research Vol. 25 No. 6 December 1998 P. 689

sense that people would favor mechanism for flagging or eliminating behavior that distracts from the topic.”³⁸

Those observations are certainly applicable to consultations about urban development projects. Let’s imagine that online forums are overwhelmed with local issues that have nothing to do with urban planning, potential participants might get “lost” in such an array of topics and become reluctant to join discussions on their project of interest while authorities might get frustrated by how the topic derived from their planning needs and become reluctant to use such mediums for future consultations.

Demographics

It is also important to understand that the huge gap between successes of e-democracy initiatives from a country to another can be explained, not only by the economic wealth of a given country, but also by numerous other socio-economic factors. Having and facilitating access to technologies does not lead to an instant increase usage of technology for a political participation purposes. As mentioned by Chadwick “Building the infrastructure seems to be no guarantee that it will be used for community building.”³⁹ Both the level of ICT development and the maturity of democracy will have an impact on the efficiency of e-democracy. Lenard and McGonegal elaborated five factors that can explain the variation in internet penetration:

1. Educational attainment
2. The relative size of the high-tech sector in the local economy
3. Popular growth
4. Median household income
5. Median age⁴⁰

³⁸ WISE Kevin, HAMMAN Brian & THORSON Kjerstin. *Moderation, Response Rate, and Message interactivity Features of online communities and Their Effects on Intent to Participate*. Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication. 2006, P. 32

³⁹ CHADWICK, Andrew. *Internet Politics. States, Citizens and New Communication Technologies*. Oxford University Press 2006 P. 102.

⁴⁰ LENARD, Thomas M. & MCGONEGAL, Stephen. *Quantifying the Economic and Demographic Factors Affecting Internet Connectivity*. Urban Development and the Internet. P. 130-131

Note: Many other studies have been published on the digital divide topic. My choice to pick this particular one was leaded by its focus on demographic factors and the notion of the high tech sector which, to my knowledge was never cited before.

Those factors can certainly be helpful in determining the influence of the use of electronic tools in the participation process for urban development projects and how they can affect the demographics and profile of potential participants. For example the “size of the high-tech sector in the local economy” means that it might be much easier to succeed with e-participation initiatives for urban development projects in a city such as Silicon Valley in California USA than a city with a more traditional industrial economy where new technologies is not of such importance in the daily life of its citizens. Although access is a very important factor to consider authorities should keep in mind that, as noted by Mossberger & al.: “Access is merely a means to an end; it is the ability to use information technology that is the ultimate goal.”⁴¹

As seen earlier, youth is often reluctant to participate in traditional ways such as Town Hall meetings and workshops. This absence might strongly be explained by the lack of free time for young professionals, especially those with small children. The internet usage being often associated with youth, electronic participation creates hope of a higher political involvement from the younger generations. It was observed in the United Kingdom in 2002 that, “[...] using the more contextualized model of internet-based participation, political activity is actually found to be most likely among younger people and those with a high level of internet familiarity, regardless of socioeconomic status.”⁴² The mention of “regardless of socioeconomic status” is quite interesting meaning that, at least in most developed countries, internet is now widely accessible to all levels of society, thus reducing the digital divide issues. The divide resides more on inter-generational issues than financial means. Gibson, Lusoli and Ward, also mentioned above, observed in further studies that “Online participants [...] are significantly more likely to be male, highly educated and of high socioeconomic status.”⁴³ This finding would lead me to evaluate that values such as income and wealth still might have an effect. As observed earlier, it is important to keep in mind the geographical specificities before jumping to such conclusions on demographics of online political participation.

⁴¹ MOSSBERGER Karen, TOLBERT Caroline J. and MCNEAL Ramona S., *Digital Citizenship. The Internet Society, and Participation*. The MIT Press Cambridge Massachusetts & London England. 2008 P.12

⁴² GIBSON Karen K., LUSOLI Wainer & WARD Stephen. *Online Participation in the UK: Testing a 'Contextualized' Model of Internet Effects*. Political Studies Association. 2005 Vol. 7 P. 562.

⁴³ GIBSON Karen K., LUSOLI Wainer & WARD Stephen. *Online Participation in the UK: Testing a 'Contextualized' Model of Internet Effects*. Political Studies Association. 2005 Vol. 7 P. 572

The higher participation from males is quite worrying and might be an indication that efforts are still needed in order to reach gender equity in ICT use. Mossberger and al. also covered the gender issue in their research and came to the conclusion that: “Gender is not a factor in access, but age, income, education, race ethnicity and location matter. While women are statistically less likely to have home Internet access than men, the substantive magnitude of this effect is small (only a 2 percent difference).”⁴⁴ The same authors noted on the same issue that : “The gender gap has virtually closed in the frequency of use just as it did earlier in access [...] women have a 34 percent (P= .004) likelihood of being online every day compared to 35 percent (P= .004) for men.”⁴⁵ Daily use of Internet is a highly important data regarding e-participation as a constant use of technology can lead to a higher probability of using it for civic matters. While those conclusions are somewhat positive for gender issues, it is capital to keep in mind that this particular research was done exclusively in the United States which is more advanced regarding Internet access and use than most countries. Studies focusing on Western European countries such as Belgium also observed a closing of the gender gap.⁴⁶

Civil Society

When it comes to civic engagement, younger generations seem more and more eager to join interest groups and less and less to join traditional political parties or to contact directly governmental authorities. In the United States, a recent study observed that “The last decade as seen an explosion in the number of grassroots organizations as citizens rely more extensively on groups that they trust to keep them informed on what is happening in Congress and to help them become engaged in public policy.”⁴⁷ This new portrait of civil society has a major influence on how e-participation is done

⁴⁴ MOSSBERGER Karen, TOLBERT Caroline J. and MCNEAL Ramona S., *Digital Citizenship. The Internet Society, and Participation*. The MIT Press Cambridge Massachusetts & London England. 2008 P.109 (Chapter with Bridgett King)

⁴⁵ MOSSBERGER Karen, TOLBERT Caroline J. and MCNEAL Ramona S., *Digital Citizenship. The Internet Society, and Participation*. The MIT Press Cambridge Massachusetts & London England. 2008 P.115 (Chapter with Bridgett King)

⁴⁶ VENDRAMIN Patricia & VALENDUC Gerard, *Internet et inégalités Une radiographie de la fracture numérique*, Editions Labor, collection Quartier libre, Bruxelles, 2003

⁴⁷ HYSOM Tim. *Communicating with Congress. Recommendations for Improving the Democratic Dialogue*. Congressional Management Foundation USA 2008 P. 23-25

and perceived by the population. Internet is a network that, by definition, facilitates the grouping of individuals, information dissemination and mobilization. This network plays a great role in increasing the influence of interest groups on the political sphere not only due to the many to many nature of the communication scheme as mentioned earlier but also, and mostly, due to its low cost of use. As mentioned by Chadwick: “The Net often lowers entry costs and allows poorly funded groups to behave as if they have greater resources than they in fact possess. For instance they are able to build networks using emails and websites and do not have to pay for permanent official staff in central offices.”⁴⁸ E-Mobilization is a recent movement that changes totally the power and influence game traditionally observed in political movements.

In the United States, electronic forms or e-mails are a popular way of contacting government officials through what is often called “grassroots advocacy campaigns” in order to increase the volume of communication. Those electronic means of communication are often left aside as authorities do not consider this way of communicating as legitimate as the most traditional ones. Even though advocacy groups often propose to their supporters to edit, replace or add to the text provided, most keep it as is, resulting in a high amount of identical letters arriving to representatives. The similarity of those letters lead to the lack of trust and consideration from authorities.⁴⁹

Electronic tools bring to democracy the possibility of a many-to-many communication flow. Before the emergence of new technologies, authorities were communicating to citizens in a top-down model, nowadays everyone has access to an easy channel enabling them to reach a very high number of people. The creation of networks is facilitated by those technologies and the balance of power influence is no longer the same. Blogs and other open source type websites have greatly contributed in the establishment of those new balances. The many-to-many communication flow also helps greatly in reducing the costs of information sharing.

⁴⁸ CHADWICK, Andrew. *Internet Politics. States, Citizens and New Communication Technologies*. Oxford University Press 2006 P. 120

⁴⁹ HYSOM Tim. *Communicating with Congress. Recommendations for Improving the Democratic Dialogue*. Congressional Management Foundation USA 2008 P. 10.

Modern public administrations also saw the arrival of a multiplication of stakeholders involved in a given project. It is not anymore a matter of negotiation between the government and its citizens or local businesses but a whole new dimension is added with the numerous non-governmental organizations who wish to be directly involved in policy-making. Urban developers, more precisely, regularly have to provide details of their projects to environmental groups wishing to evaluate the impact of the project. If those groups are not included in the participatory process, manifestation of disappointment might come not only from the group itself but from all its supporters. Issues of social nature are certainly not the only ones covered by interest groups and having an impact on urban planning. O'Hara also observed that issues dearest to residents when surveyed about urban development mostly "connote quality of life-related issues, rather than purely economic development issues"⁵⁰ The involvement of interest group emerging from the civil society might bring into the debate those economic development related issues by involving local chambers of commerce for example. Such chambers are common lobbyists of economical issues. Davidoff also emphasized on the importance of involving interest groups in urban planning:

"Determinations, of what serves the public interest, in a society containing many diverse interest groups are almost always of a highly contentious nature. In performing its role of prescribing courses of action leading to future desired states, the planning profession must engage itself thoroughly and openly in the contention surrounding political determination.

Moreover, planners should be able to engage in the political process as advocates of the interest both of government and of such other groups, organizations or individuals who are concerned with proposing policies for the future development of the community."⁵¹

It is quite interesting to note that this statement was made in the sixties where political power still had a strong hold on most interest groups and certainly a higher credibility. This might mean that urban planners should have a particular consideration for those groups in their planning.

⁵⁰ O'HARA Sabine U. *Urban Development Revisited : The Role of Neighborhood Needs and Local Participation in Urban Revitalization*. Review of Social Economy VOL. LIX No. 1 March 2001 P. 26

⁵¹ DAVIDOFF Paul. *Advocacy and Pluralism in Planning*. Journal of the American Planning Association. November 1965 P.331

Methodology

Through the previously elaborated literature review, I analyzed various scientific articles and books related to e-democracy and participation in urban development. I also used generalist books on e-governance as a guidance. This review aimed to get a sense of the theoretical findings and analysis regarding e-participation for urban development projects. In order to get a concrete portrait of the impacts of using electronic tools during a participatory process in the context of an urban development project, I had to get a sense of real cases. To do so, I used a questionnaire of over fifteen questions that I sent to project leaders of different urban development projects that have used e-participation platforms in the past. The questionnaires helped greatly in confronting the academic findings from the literature review to concrete experiences. The cities studied were from different locations across the world in order to get a better variety of answers and interpretations. All those cities were from the most developed countries making them easier to compare with each other. The goal was also to avoid a bias from different technological level and maturity of democracy. The concept being quite new and many local governments being still reluctant to use e-democracy, the cases are unfortunately quite rare and scarce.

A major challenge I came across was the low number of cases relevant to my research topic due to the quite recent nature of this approach. With a ratio of about 20% answers from the questionnaires sent, some questions appear over the transparency from authorities using e-participation and their reluctance to “participate” to a study on participation. This low rate brings the major disadvantage that cities cannot learn from each other’s experiences if they are reluctant to share it for academic purposes. The websites and platforms analyzed were also often unclear when it comes to contacting the individuals responsible for the project. I estimate that, in order to facilitate usage and comprehension of such tools, it is essential to have a clear and easy contact point allowing a human interface to technology. Such an access point could simultaneously serve as a help desk for users and contribute to a learning climate for those wishing to learn more about such processes.

The research questions being mostly based on the learning of those experiences, the study was entirely qualitative. The goal was not to set clear statistics on the use of e-participation or to analyze the efficiency of different tools but to set a map of

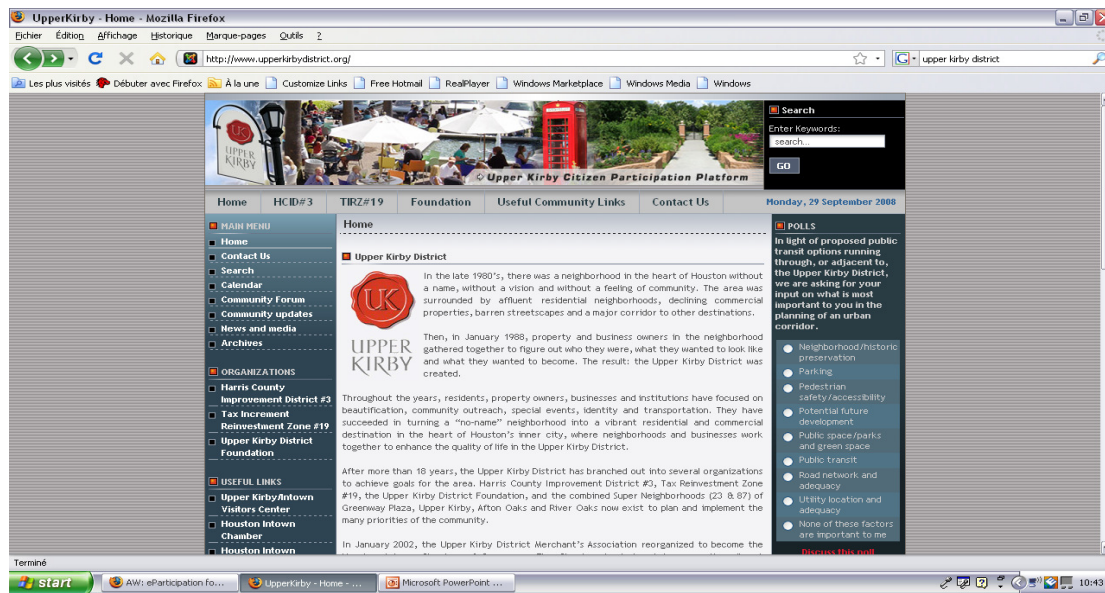
problems and positive experiences encountered. There was no discrimination with regards to the platform used and the study does not aim to get an idea of which platform or specific technology is more efficient. The data collection was done by compiling and analyzing the answers provided from the questionnaire sent to project managers from different cities and comparing each of them.

Case Studies

As shown in the previous chapter, there is a great depth and diversity of theoretical research related to e-participation. However the true effect of e-participation on urban development projects remains to be clarified through specific case studies. The cases described below provide a broad overview of the effects of e-participation on projects in several cities around the globe. In order to ensure comparability between them, every one of these cases is located in the most developed countries and benefit from a high technological penetration. As demonstrated previously, this can facilitate the use of electronic tools for political participation. For example, all cities are within a country that ranks quite high in the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development's (OECD) Broadband Statistics on Households with access to a home computer.⁵²

⁵² OECD, ICT database and Eurostat, Community Survey on ICT usage in households and by individuals, April 2007.

Case 1: Houston, USA – Upper Kirby District⁵³



The United States of America was one of the first countries to make use of e-governance strategies. Partly due to large distances there was a need in the US to find ways to facilitate communication between government and its citizens. Another factor also important to take into account is the importance of communicating directly with representatives for Americans as it is embedded in the first amendment of their Constitution. It is strongly believed that “Citizens must be able to communicate with their government and be engaged in public policy to maintain a robust and healthy democracy.”⁵⁴ What is relevant for the central government in Washington is also applicable to local governments. Houston, in this respect, is an interesting example. With a population of over two million, the city is the fourth largest city in the United States. The Houston district of Upper Kirby was quite innovative by implementing an online platform for e-participation. However, the urban development department of the city of Houston is, based on a telephone discussion with a member of the urban planning department, still far away from making full use of electronic tools. The city only provides information online but no feedback channels have been set up yet.

⁵³ See questionnaire in Annex I

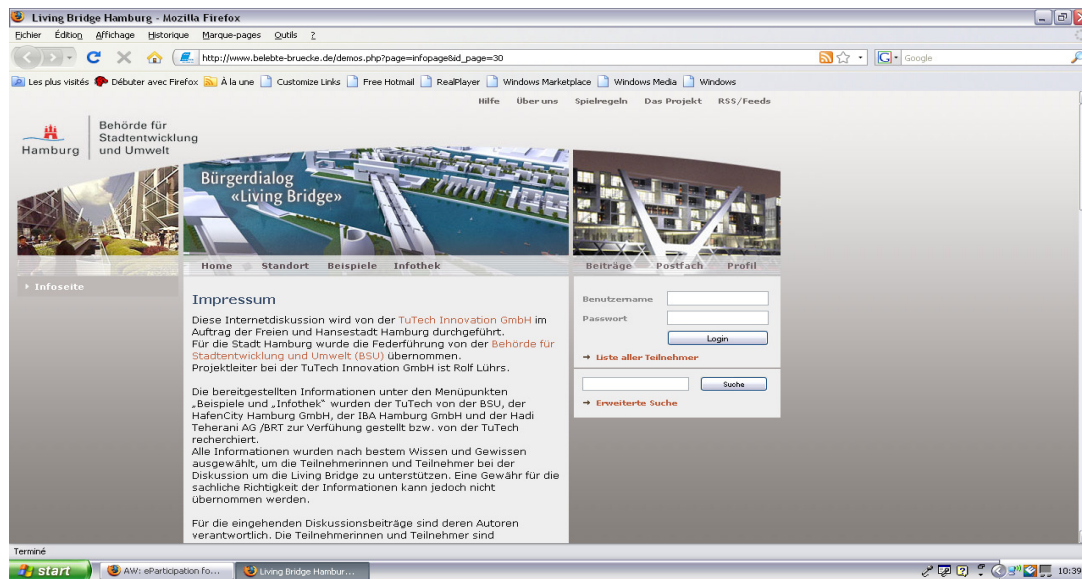
⁵⁴ HYSOM Tim. *Communicating with Congress. Recommendations for Improving the Democratic Dialogue*. Congressional Management Foundation USA 2008 P. 15

The District's staff is responsible for managing and monitoring the website. The district had quite an original idea of promotion by advertising their website on door hangers of properties concerned by the project. They also used the local chamber of commerce newsletter to reach out to local businesses about all their updates. A major advantage noted by the project leaders was the reduction of administrative tasks such as compiling information and sharing it with citizens. The website allowed the local administration to make public documents available online. An improvement of the relationship between citizens and authorities has also been observed due to the facilitation of communication flow between the two. Transparency and trust are also two essential arguments in this improvement of relationship.

Even though they did not promote the website to non-governmental organizations they did not obstruct their participation in any way. Only owners of businesses or properties within the district's boundaries were allowed to register online to participate. Their input was then compared to the general public opinion. The comparison between the comments from registered citizens and the larger public was used for decision-making and described as very useful. The project leaders are quite satisfied by the quality of the different comments and point of view they have received.

The only problem mentioned by the project leader was the need to encourage broader participation, which leads me to believe that the number of participants was considered too low. Some improvements are anticipated for the future e-participation initiatives, including a better promotion of the tools available and a more accurate and representative sample of the district.

Case 2: Hamburg, Germany⁵⁵



In Germany, it is mandatory for every urban development project to go through a participatory process.⁵⁶ The city of Hamburg established an online participatory process for their project called “Living Bridge” with the collaboration of TU Tech GmbH; a business also based in Germany who works in collaboration with Hamburg Innovation and all Hamburg institutions of higher education, which constitutes the link between science and industry in Hamburg.⁵⁷ The same organization helped the project leaders in gathering the information and comments collected. They collaboratively created an evaluation report which was appreciated by the local authorities.

The marketing and promotion methods used in Hamburg were quite traditional involving e-mails, press relations and the use of community leaders alongside with community planning meetings. On a positive note, they observed a certain increase on the total amount of participants. Measuring the increase of participation was quite difficult due to the absence of such statistics from previous consultation processes but they still evaluate an approximate increase from 10 to 20%.

⁵⁵ See questionnaire in Annex II

⁵⁶ Pep-Net – Pan European e-Participation Network Blog. *Online tool for formal participation in urban planning tested in Hamburg.* www.pep-net.eu/wordpress/?p=126

⁵⁷ TUTech Innovation GmbH. <http://tutech.de>

The project leaders believe that one of the major problems with the process was that extending the project by one month turned out to be a disadvantage creating challenges for retaining the interest of participants and keeping them involved. The main positive aspect noted was generating public and media awareness, considering how recent the e-participation process is, it is particularly advantageous to multiply the communication channels. The organizers were also pleased by the diversification in addition to the level of details for the comments received. The electronic means also brought the advantage of having comments directly written down and available to consult for those interested thus adding to the transparency of the process already present.

Even though the project leaders were satisfied with the quality of the debate and consider that they had a positive return on investment, the organizers do not consider re-using e-participation in their future urban development projects, at least not in a short term. Considering the mandatory aspect of participatory process for urban development projects in the country, it seems like more traditional forms of consultation might come back in strength on a short term basis, at least in the city of Hamburg. It is possible that TU Tech, the local organization involved in researches on interactive communication, might influence the local authorities to use electronic tools for future urban development projects involving participation.

Case 3: Métamorphose. Lausanne, Switzerland⁵⁸



In Switzerland, there is a phenomenon called the “Swiss Paradox” due to the conjunction of a very old participatory democracy, one of the best Internet penetration among the OECD countries but yet, a quite low use of those technologies, especially for political participation purposes.

The City of Lausanne decided to delegate the management of the participatory process to a non governmental and apolitical group called *OLA* (Oui Lausanne Avance) meaning yes, Lausanne is moving forward. Traditional mediums were used to promote electronic participating to the population at large. Small creative events were also put together in order to raise awareness and curiosity about the platform. In order to set the principle of the participatory process as soon as possible, a charter of participation was established and shared via the project’s website.

Technical problems faced by the project in its early phase certainly did not help in creating a habit of visiting and using the website since accessing it was rarely

⁵⁸ See questionnaires Annex III

successful. My personal experience trying to access the website often lead to a technical failure notice. There is a high probability that potential users gave up or simply forgot to return to the site to participate. Only individuals were able to participate but no formal verification was made about online subscribers. The local government (city) was strongly involved with a high level of attention and a visible sponsorship of the project and its electronic platform.

Among the problems and challenges observed was the lack of skilled human resources able to implement and maintain technically and functionally the electronic platform. The local government was quite happy that this project helped in demystifying electronic participation to a population traditionally reticent to change. The leaders I consulted stressed the importance of internal training. The Lausanne experience shows the importance of first ensuring that people within the local administration fully understand the system, as they are the ones who are primarily responsible for dealing with the new tools.

As mentioned previously, the population demonstrated low interest in participating and expressed major skepticism toward the value of participating by determining that the major issues were already decided. This reticence might be explained by the fact that local government established a specific framework for the project before starting the participation process. As per the general population, they expressed the desire of debating general ideas about city development. This gap between the different perceptions is at the base of the misunderstanding leading to such a low number of participants.

Case 4: CBD Into the Future Project, Auckland, New Zealand⁵⁹



The city of Auckland uses Internet for a Project called *CBD Into the Future* but not primarily for participation and exchange purposes. The site is intended mostly to facilitate the dissemination of information and collect formal feedback through an electronic form. An e-newsletter to which Auckland's residents can subscribe has always been a strong gateway for gathering feedback electronically. No discussion forum or chat rooms are in use yet. The *CBD* projects fall into a global strategy and action from the City of Auckland focusing on future developments of the city.

In order to get a significantly high number of participants, The City Council adopted a communication strategy that included the uses of many different media such as local newspapers, onsite signage (sites involved in development project), flyers and direct mailing. The possibility to participate online was clearly stated on all promotion material along with the different ways to participate (workshops and mailing mostly). Their observations lead them to conclude that the traditional media are usually a good way to raise awareness on public participation processes. Communication and

⁵⁹ See questionnaire Annex IV

exchanges between experts involved in the projects and “ordinary” citizens is always done through traditional workshops.

The information and feedbacks received were collected manually and then divided by general themes with the help of *Excel* spreadsheets. Consultations started from the very beginning of the project in order to avoid the feeling of top-down policies from the government to the citizens. Feedbacks were received on an ongoing process. The same media that were used to promote the participation initiative were used to communicate the use made of the feedbacks received and how they impacted the final layout of the project.

They were quite satisfied by the diversification of participants allowed through the use of electronic means. Even though they still had a higher participation by mail, Internet helped in broadening the audience which was greatly appreciated. Regarding the problems encountered, they still were not entirely satisfied by the number of participants and found it challenging to attract the interest of the general public to the project. They also found it challenging to inform people that the project was on its way and when it would be possible to provide input on a particular topic. Even if the use of electronic means was somehow limited to feedback forms and information dissemination for the CBD project, this experience has lead the City Council of Auckland and the project managers to consider increasing the use of electronic media as appropriate.

Case 5: Oxford, United Kingdom⁶⁰

Forums Home About Forums More Forums Help Log In
E-Democracy.Org Forums

Group: Oxford - Central, South and West Neighbourhood Forum

Topics
Files
Members
Charter

Oxford - Central, South and West Neighbourhood Forum Home

Welcome to the Oxford - Central, South and West Neighbourhood Forum

Welcome to the Central, South and West Neighbourhood Issues Forum. This is a place where you can discuss anything that interests you in the CSW area of Oxford. (Photo found on www.flickr.com, taken by 'Travelling Steve'). [More](#)

The Forum Manager for this group is [Shey Cobley](#).

Related Issues Forums

- [Oxford - Headington & Marston Neighbourhood Forum](#)
- [Oxford - Cowley Neighbourhood Forum](#)

Join or Leave Forum

- [Register and join Oxford - Central, South and West Neighbourhood Forum](#) - For new members without an account on this site.
- You are NOT logged in to Oxford - Central, South and West Neighbourhood Forum or E-Democracy.Org. If you already have an account, please [log in to leave or join](#).

[Latest Topics](#)

The City Council of Oxford uses an online forum to gather comments about urban planning projects but also neighborhood and community life in general. The City Council hosts and manages three forums covering different areas of the city. The United Kingdom benefits from a strong tradition of electronic participation for policy development, budget discussions and many other topics which helps in creating the habit of always thinking about using electronic means to share comments with governmental authorities. There is a quite popular website in the United Kingdom called *Fix my Street*⁶¹ where residents can report, view, or discuss local problems. Such initiatives positively create a habit of simultaneously being aware of your surroundings and sharing your views about it online. Larger urban development projects can then benefit from such a habit and use it to attract a higher number of participants to their online platforms.

About the Oxford case, the marketing to promote the forum was done through community meetings and by posting posters on notice boards. The local government (through the City Council) seems quite highly involved in the process. An example of that involvement would be how they posted the results of the consultations on the Council's webpage. This approach is quite interesting as it demonstrates a certain leadership from both elected officials and the public administration.

⁶⁰ See questionnaire in Annex V

⁶¹ Fix my Street. www.fixmystreet.com

A major challenge observed throughout the project was to keep a focus in the different conversations going on as they had a tendency to be unstructured and easily go off track. A few participants were also observed as being more vocal resulting in a requirement of closer management from the website officers. In order to solve this problem, they are considering, for future consultations, asking more specific questions hoping that it would help them keeping conversations on a somehow controlled track.

The forum manager observed that even if the online platform might not have gathered many more people, the positive aspect was that it made it easier for people already interested in participating to do so. It was mostly another tool for gaining opinions. Another positive aspect came from the inconvenience of having difficulties controlling the discussions as it helped make the Council aware of issues and concerns they ignored before.

A little visit to the website quickly gives the impression that some discussion topics are quite lively and attract insightful contributions. The “Bonn Square” topic for example has over 100 comments that could easily be considered of high value. This kind of contributions can be extremely useful for urban planners who are in need of new external ideas.

Analysis

It is important to keep in mind, once again, that all studied cities and districts were from some of the most developed countries where Internet penetration is quite high and access to technology is considered as easy. Nonetheless, it is important to keep in mind that access and presence of the technology does not guarantee an elaborate use and understanding of the different technologies in place. The statement concerning easy access is especially true considering the urban nature of those projects. It is not known if the cities that contributed to this study had in place services to facilitate ICT use through infrastructures available in public spaces such as schools or libraries and a human interface to facilitate usage and comprehension. Even if each city had a different level of interactivity and offered different ways to gather feedback, they all aimed at using information technologies to improve community planning.

Problems encountered

Given that the use of electronic means for participation purposes in urban development projects is a very new practice, the low participation observed in most projects should not be too much of a worry. It will certainly take time to install the habit of online participation throughout the general population, in addition to those already taking part in political and civil society activities. As it is the case for most e-governance initiatives, it takes a long time to build the trust and confidence toward governmental online platforms and the use of the received feedbacks.

In general, promoting the platform effectively is key for the success of a participatory process. Recruiting a sufficiently high number of participants seemed to have been a primary challenge for all analyzed cities. This is a key issue to resolve because one major potential consequence of low participation is certainly the vicious effect of refraining participation due to the absence of interaction and debate. Online discussions forums and/or chat rooms are frequently used by citizens who are looking for thoughts from their peers in order to make up their own mind. A deserted forum or chat room might discourage people from expressing their thoughts on a specific public issue. A low number of participants can also increase the perception that comments would not be taken into consideration from authorities due to the small and unrepresentative sample. My personal analysis also leads me to believe that the low levels of participation seen in the case study projects is a result of the fact that in general, the public consultations tended to target only a small sample of affected residents, rather than a broader public. I also conclude that having a more precise scope defined for each forum topic would help in developing specific promotion methods to attract each target groups and inspire them to participate and contribute to the project.

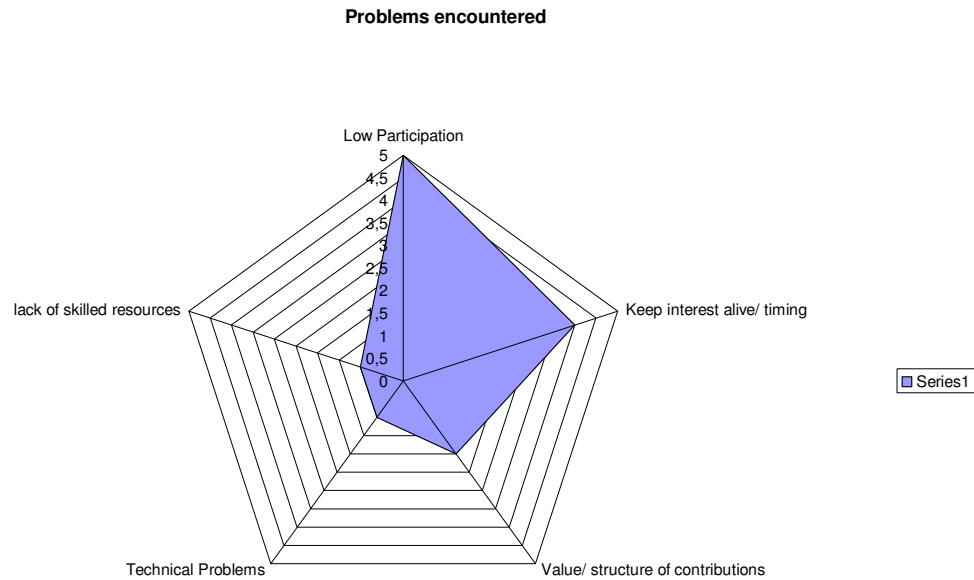
Moderation is a key issue whenever an online forum or platform is used. Strong opinion leaders can easily take control of the platform and lead conversations to a totally off topic issue or discourage people unused to controversial public debate in joining the discussion. The Oxford example was a good case of monopolization of conversations.

It is also worrying that most of the projects discussed did not allow and/or encourage non governmental associations to join discussions on the same level as individuals. As seen in the literature review, civil society tends to mobilize population more easily for civic participation. It would therefore be very interesting to truly involve organized groups on the administration's platform rather than risk the multiplication of alternative sites emerging from the same groups that have been prevented from participating in the formal process.

The presence of technical problems experienced by the city of Lausanne demonstrates the importance of making sure that the infrastructures is thoroughly tested and that they have sufficient resources (both human and financial) to face technical problems as they come before the official launch of the project. If an individual hears about the project through their promotion efforts, goes to the concerned website and fail to use it due to technical problems, chances are high that this individual would not go back to the platform. The failure would make all the best marketing efforts completely spoiled. In a scenario where resources were not in place to fix the problem in a timely manner and potential participants fail to access the site for days, the value of the experience would be close to none.

At least two cities (Hamburg and Auckland) project leaders also mentioned that the duration of the project and the timing of consultation was a major challenge. As a consequence of the usually long timeframe of urban development projects, citizens are not always aware at what point in the process their comments would be most useful. If the participation process is too spread out all along the project, it is difficult to keep interest alive and encouraging people to regularly come back to the website and contribute. This problem is also strongly related to the challenge in keeping a high interest towards the project within the population. Local governments in fact often have a hard time creating momentum behind their projects. As seen in the literature review, if citizens do not feel individually affected by the project or do not understand the issues well and their impact on their daily lives, they are very unlikely to participation in consultations.

The chart below demonstrates the frequency of each mentioned encountered problem:



Positive experiences

The increase of transparency by making the basis of the project publicly and so easily available seems to lead to the positive experience of increasing trust between citizens and governmental authorities. Facilitating access to documents, information sharing and discussions on the project are also generally strongly appreciated by the population. The written nature of electronic participation also increases transparency in comparison with oral discussions retransmitted on paper from more traditional consultations. The recent multiplication of cyber-administrations leads to no, or significantly less, sense of hiding the different elements of decision-making and important documents from the government. This leads to the probability that population, which typically fails to find the time to go to the City Council for information on a specific project, would be more likely to participate if electronic means allow them to. As mentioned, earlier, the low participation observed in most of

the case studies might be solved with time and as habits of using electronic means to reach public administrations become more generalized.

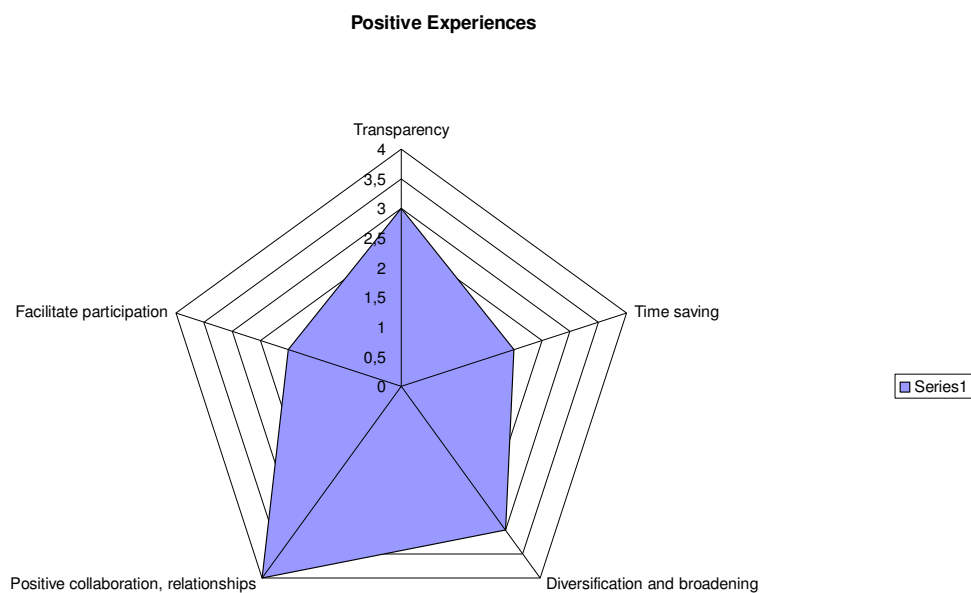
The fact that certain managers from cities, such as Hamburg and Lausanne, delegated the participatory process to non-governmental and apolitical organization turned out to be a positive experience in creating new collaborations. Considering the lack of trust generally observed in the general population toward politicians and sometimes even public administrations, it might help in recruiting participants if the invitation comes from a non-governmental and apolitical third party. Such collaboration also leads to a greater sense of neutrality leading to an incitation to openly comment and discuss the different issues.

As seen from the literature review, the quality of the debate on online platforms and the sense that forums are too often monopolized by strong politicized leaders of opinion is often criticized. The questionnaires received demonstrated that even considering this frequent criticism, an undeniable advantage of using electronic tools is to facilitate participation. Those who wish to express an opinion about a project or ask a question to authorities can do so without any location or time constraint. Electronic tools were also appreciated considering how most of the consulted administrations value a higher diversification of opinions. The diversification of opinion was a great asset for certain cities and it made them consider the e-participation process worth it.

The fact that almost all project leaders in cities studied considered the return on investment from these experience positive points optimistically toward an increase of urban development projects would consider using electronic platforms for their future participatory processes. The low cost of mobilization on internet is indeed a good part of the explanation why the investment is quite easily covered. Exchanges and networking facilitated by internet and other electronic means reduces significantly the costs of information sharing between individuals but also between governments, administrations and residents, resulting in smoother and cheaper communication. The positive effect of facilitating communication might also be considered as a positive return on investment as it helps in raising confidence towards governmental authorities and establish more positive collaborations.

The use of electronic means can also save a lot of time to administrations who benefit from a unique platform where to store all relevant documents and direct information requests from the population. The City of Houston project leader even mentioned the lowering of administrative tasks as a major advantage of using electronic means to disseminate information.

The chart below demonstrates the frequency of each mentioned positive experience:



General observations

An important research question I hoped to answer was regarding the influence of the use of electronic tools in the demographics of participants in a participation process for an urban development project. Unfortunately, none of the cities discussed here went through a demographic survey of the participants making it difficult to prove or disprove the theory. However, it is likely that most participants correspond to a general description of typical online political participants. Also, very few of the analyzed cities used their electronic platform to facilitate discussion between the

experts involved and the citizens at large. Such exchanges took place, in most cases, in more traditional and oral workshops thus reducing the many visual possibilities facilitated by ICTs which help greatly in increasing the understanding of the project at large.

Recommendations

City administrators who intend to implement an e-participation initiative for the first time, either for an urban development project or any other consultation of public nature should seriously consider the following recommendations.

Even when using a third party to manage the participatory process, authorities should **make the e-participation projects fit under a wider consultation strategy for urban development projects that would be relevant to the city's development strategy.** The problems faced by the City of Lausanne demonstrate the challenge of fitting an urban development project within a wider city development strategy but once the goals are well communicated it is worth it. The City of Auckland also had a case of consultation for an urban development project within a wider strategy (*CBD projects*) which seemed quite positive. As observed by Ann Macintosh, in order to be successful, project leaders must keep in mind that “In selecting pilot e-democracy projects it is important to ensure that they fit into the normal business processes of the Council [...]”⁶². As observed from the literature review, the “cookie cutter” approach is rarely efficient in urban planning. Keeping in mind this statement will also make things much easier when it comes to evaluating the project, as evaluation grids are already known and implemented for the concerned processes.⁶³ The importance of measuring, monitoring and evaluating at the end of such a project will never be stressed enough.

A major communication strategy needs to be put in place for the whole layout of the project. The different steps, including the participatory process, would all need to be communicated clearly to the general public. The strategy should include a massive

⁶² MACINTOSH Ann. *Characterizing E-Participation in Policy-Making*. Proceedings of the 37th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences 2004. P. 7

⁶³ MACINTOSH Ann. *Characterizing E-Participation in Policy-Making*. Proceedings of the 37th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences 2004. P. 7

recruiting phase just before the participation is open to all. Communication efforts should also be done in collaboration with the different interest and civil society groups of the region in order to top interest their members and create trust in the process. The promotion efforts to invite as many people as possible to participate to the development of an urban development project were a major challenge for most of the analyzed cases. The array of promotional methods use was quite large between all of them but each still faced recruiting issues. Keeping in mind the goal to raise the number of participants, project managers should consider using different individuals from the public administration or associated group to feed the debate. Considering their high knowledge of the topic they might help in both increasing the understanding of the project and helping in creating a positive opinion. Experts such as planners, architects, developers and economists should also join debates in addition to their more formal information sessions. None of the cities included did a demographic study on their participants but this would be a great thing to do in order to determine the target public of such platforms. A communication strategy can only be efficient if there is a specific target public determined and objectives are elaborated keeping in mind the needs and habits of this public.

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, when e-participation is used for urban development purposes, it is important not to follow the “cookie cutter” technique but to **consider the local realities and then adapt the project and platform to those realities**. As observed by Bradwell and Marr in their research on online collaboration “[...] analysis and approaches of one country may not successfully translate directly to another. What is a global desire for collaboration will require local knowledge in order to succeed.”⁶⁴ What is applicable on the international level on a country-to-country basis if, evidently, also applicable on a city level. Approaches and collaborations may vary from one city to another even in the same country. Different urban development projects within the same city might also have different target publics and goals all of which would also need to consider a different way of consulting the population and get their feedback or even a different type of platform to use.

⁶⁴ BRADWELL Peter & MARR Sarah, *Making the Most of Collaboration an International Survey of Public Service Co-Design*. Demos Report 23 in association with PwC’s Public Sector Research Centre. 2008 P. 45

To increase the reflex of using online tools for participation purposes and its understanding, it would be an interesting idea to **start the e-democratic “habit” with online voting**. Cities analyzed who already had electronic platforms in place for processes such as budgeting or policy making (Oxford and Hamburg) benefited from a higher participation. On that issue, researchers from United Kingdom observed that “[...] since voting- the most common type of offline activity – is not available online at the national level, this would clearly further depress the overall pool of online participators.”⁶⁵ Mossberger & al also highlighted this importance of voting in the democratic process: “[...] voting is considered by political scientists to be the core activity in the exercise of democratic participation. It is also the most widespread political activity.”⁶⁶ Online surveys are also an efficient way to gather opinions on a very specific topic and that is similar to the exercise of voting. Urban planners could also use it to have a broad idea of how the project is received within the population. It is important to keep in mind that that information and communication technologies (ICTs) constitute a tool that could also be called enabler to facilitate democratic processes, not a miraculous and instant way of improving participation.

Promotion, education and training efforts need to be done collaboratively from all levels of government if we wish to see a significant increase of online participation. This statement would be particularly of interest for federal countries such as The United States of Switzerland. The advantages, especially related to time saving, efficiency and bureaucracy reducing issues need to be communicated clearly. Promotion efforts of democratic duties also need to be considered, the low level of political participation is indeed a major issue in many countries especially most developed countries with an aging population problem. This problem goes much further then the access to certain tools therefore authorities need to understand that e-democracy is not a magical solution to political participation at large but an enabler to engage more people in the democratic process and through different tools.

⁶⁵ GIBSON Karen K., LUSOLI Wainer & WARD Stephen. *Online Participation in the UK: Testing a ‘Contextualized’ Model of Internet Effects*. Political Studies Association. 2005 Vol. 7 P. 571.

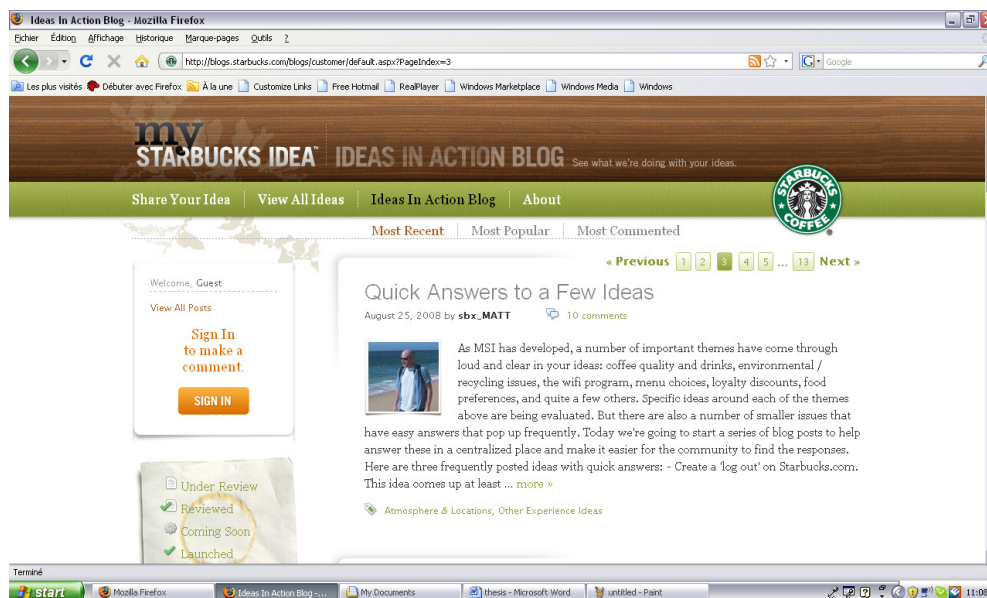
⁶⁶ MOSSBERGER Karen, TOLBERT Caroline J. and MCNEAL Ramona S., *Digital Citizenship. The Internet Society, and Participation*. The MIT Press Cambridge Massachusetts & London England. 2008 P.68

As mentioned earlier, urban development project can be extremely complex, involve many different technical aspects and cover issues that are further then the common vision of community living. All those factors tend to refrain many residents to contribute to consultations on a given project. **Electronic means should facilitate a dialogue between experts such as planners, architects, developers, economists and others and the so-called “ordinary” citizens with the aim to increase comprehension of the project at large.** To achieve this facilitation, cities should consider using 3D visualization with the help of Geographical Information Systems (GIS). It would greatly facilitate attractiveness of the platform and comprehension between the experts and the general public. Citizens residing in concerned neighborhoods can directly see the change planned and comment on how this would affect them, either positively or negatively. It could also help people in contributing on the project as a whole in opposition to commenting about specific objects affecting them that might have a minor influence on the overall implementation. As mentioned by Al-Kodmany: “Visualization provides a focus for a community’s discussion or design ideas; it guides community members through the design process, it raises their design awareness and facilitates better communication.”⁶⁷

Before implementing the electronic platform, administrators need to ensure that it is secure and that the privacy of users will be protected. Such measures would, evidently, have to be communicated at large and early in the process. Information security and privacy are two factors of great importance that might influence directly electronic participation. The lack of trust towards governmental authorities increases this importance of demonstrating high privacy features. The fear might appear under the form where people would be afraid that if they log in to a site operated by their local government and that they express their opinion on this same site, authorities might get back to them based in those opinions. The possibility to participate under a pseudonym and/or to log on without having to give personal information such as e-mails and real name might increase participation but has the inconvenience of not knowing if participants are directly impacted by the project. As seen from the questionnaires received, some cities prefer to restrain participation to individuals or businesses for the concerned neighborhood, district or city at large.

⁶⁷ AL-KODMANY K. *Using Visualization Technique for Embracing Public Participation in Planning and Design: Process, Implementation, and Evaluation*. Landscape and Urban Planning 45 (1999) P. 38

The private sector also contains some good and relevant examples of how electronic means can be used in order to make participatory process more efficient and to improve the provider-user relationship. The *Starbucks*TM website is a great example of corporate e-participation. A great sense of transparency is demonstrated from the managers. **Displaying the application of comments received gives a positive sense of involvement from the participants.** As mentioned before, people do not make the effort to participate when they have a sense that their contribution would not be taken into account and/or have any effect on the final layout of the project. This transparency demonstrates that not only do management listens to the idea received but they also put them into action and takes time to explain how and why. The illustration below demonstrates how feedbacks from the staff are directly advertised on the webpage. Evidently, this particular example is one among many corporate and other examples of how customers/users/citizens or others can be directly asked for their input and innovative ideas. As it is important for governments to look outside their sector for innovative ideas, I certainly understand the challenge of flexibility which is quite different between an elected authority or a private company.



A good example to follow which is closer to the urban development issues is the *Fix my Street* example from the United Kingdom mentioned under the Oxford case. Encouraging residents to post online their observations about the city or neighborhood and to comment other people's observations is certainly a great step in creating a positive habit of e-participation and help in making sense about public and online consultations on urban planning. The presence of pictures is also a positive manner of using the visual facilitations of new technologies to increase and facilitate the understanding of a certain issue. The kind a platform leads to major time saving for both public administrations and the citizens. This platform is also a great example of user-friendliness. By making all options clear and on the front pages potential users quickly understand how the website works and are more automatically drawn to participate.

FixMyStreet [Report a problem](#) [All reports](#) [Local alerts](#) [Help](#) [Contact](#)

Report, view, or discuss local problems
(like graffiti, fly tipping, broken paving slabs, or street lighting)

Enter a nearby GB postcode, or street name and area:

How to report a problem

1. Enter a nearby GB postcode, or street name and area
2. Locate the problem on a map of the area
3. Enter details of the problem
4. We send it to the council on your behalf

FixMyStreet updates

581 reports in past week	689 fixed in past month	24,737 updates on reports
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Photos of recent reports

Recently reported problems

- [Caravan Parked On Public Road](#)
- [Dangerous Junction](#)
- [Gutter](#)

In order to ensure a high participation coupled with a high quality and value of comments posted, the **efficient moderation of the online forums and/or chat rooms is required**. Even if most of the consulted cities mentioned being overall quite satisfied with the quality of the debate observed, findings from the literature demonstrates how vital moderation is on this type of platform. Wise & al. studied the behavior of ordinary citizens interacting in online communities and observed that “The participants who viewed the moderated community reported significantly higher

intent to participate than participants who viewed the unmoderated community.”⁶⁸ This statement reiterates the general impression that online political discussions are too often mobilized by a marginal category of citizens who have really strong opinions on certain topic and feel the need to express it on every medium possible. To avoid the lack of interest due to a low value debate, it might be a good idea that people from the public administration contribute to the conversation by regularly adding informative contributions. This action would help in creating interest towards the platform but keep guaranteeing to users a certain dynamic in the debate and quality of the content. Experts involved in the project could also contribute this way. For example discussion and exchange periods could be planned between the experts and the general population where individuals and groups could ask specific questions within a dynamic of group conversation without having to move from their computer desk or sacrifice too much of their personal time.

Advocacy groups and civil society should be able to join discussions as an entity.

Online platforms for e-participation in urban development projects often allow citizens to participate and give their input solely as an individual. A restriction of that order creates an important gap between how certain citizens (especially younger generations) would prefer to pursue political and civic participation and how they are restrained to do so. The use of electronic tools creates the expectation of a higher participation from the youth but if civil society is not involved, youth might continue to step back from political participation. Considering that urban development projects affect so many groups of different nature, it is important to involve as many of those groups and as soon as possible. The collaboration between governmental authorities and groups from the civil society will not only please the citizens that favor civil engagement but also avoid division between each groups. Integrating associations gradually will allow both the public administration and the non-governmental association to make sure they are on the same pace towards their understanding of the outcome of the project and it would facilitate their communication to a wider public on the same outcomes. Urban development projects are especially concerned about this need to involve interest groups due to their high level of complexity and their

⁶⁸ WISE Kevin, HAMMAN Brian & THORSON Kjerstin. *Moderation, Response Rate, and Message interactivity Features of online communities and Their Effects on Intent to Participate*. Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication. 2006 P. 24

effect on many societal factors. Examples could include environmental groups wanting guarantees about the effects of the project on the environment or groups representing disabled people interests who wish to have guarantees on access for all. The sooner this relation of trust is created the smoother the participatory process will go.

When flowing from governmental authorities toward citizen, information sharing needs to be done as part of a global public relations strategy alongside with original communication means and tools. A general need of re-engagement of citizens is seriously needed in most countries; skepticism toward democracy is a serious issue that needs to be addressed with innovative ideas and concrete tools. ICTs are an enabler to help increase citizen engagement but it should not be considered as an end where posting information online would be measured as a decent democratic effort. There is no doubt that increasing transparency is a good step however, it is important to consider on which front we want to focus and not forget that too much transparency without structure could also lead to a disengagement. Technology can facilitate information sharing so much that most individuals find themselves overwhelmed by an information flow that they cannot control.

Even though this thesis is about the use of electronic means for participation purposes, I would like to highlight the **importance of keeping many different consultation options available.** The presence of an online platform needs to be matched with more traditional participatory processes such as town hall meetings and workshops. This combination of processes helps in avoiding the opinion bias by attracting only a certain category of people. If electronic means help in attracting a younger and more educated public, opinions from other people are just as relevant in the implementation of an urban development project. The number of participants, as mentioned earlier, will not automatically raise by adding an electronic possibility way of participating and cost from such a multiplication might be significantly higher but the diversification of opinions makes the whole process worth it. The diversification of participation means also allows a reinforcement of the process. ICTs should not be seen as a substitution but a strengthening tool. Keeping the traditional participatory processes in place will help in gradually increasing the positive perception of a wider part of the population towards governmental authorities. The multiplication of

comments accumulated by diversifying the ways of taking part to the debate would also increase the richness and value of this debate

Conclusions

Keeping in mind a purpose of strengthening democracy, participation is highly important considering that citizenship is not only a right but a duty to take part of civil life within a larger group. It is the duty of governmental authorities to give its citizens the means to participate into public life in the different ways that might suit them best. It is obvious that electronic tools are clearly not a magical solution that will suddenly gather hundreds of new participants to political life; the low participation observed by cities that have used such tools for urban development projects is a proof of that statement. Even if widespread use of electronic platforms might take a while it is important to allow as many individuals and groups as possible to join the debate using a tool that suit them best and that facilitates participation. It is necessary to put in place education and training programs about ICTs open to citizens before such a process is undergo. A good internet penetration on paper does not guarantee an automatic use of electronic means for political participation purposes. Meaning that infrastructures in place are not sufficient, there is clearly a need for human interface to encourage e-participation while making it easier to understand. Considering that none of the analyzed cases had done an analysis of the demographics of their participants, I strongly believe that it might be very interesting and of a high scientific value to study independently the demographics of electronic participation. Such finding would help greatly in assessing who are the typical users of e-participation platforms and find ways to attract a higher number of them.

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ANNEXES

Annex I – Houston, USA

Questionnaire

Executive Master in e-Governance, Ecole Polytechnique Federale de Lausanne
E-Participation for Urban Development Projects

Name: Travis Younkin
City/ Organization: Houston/ Upper Kirby District
Department: _____

By: Marianne Tremblay

1 Did you use any specific marketing method to encourage citizens to use the electronic tool?

The website is promoted via all project door hangers (hung prior to construction on all impacted properties in the project area) and on advertised public meeting notices. In addition, the District sponsors two pages in a local chamber of commerce publication to update constituents on all District endeavors and area developments. The website is promoted on these pages as well.

2a Would you consider that the use of electronic tools helped you in reaching a higher number of your participants?

I believe the use of electronic tools has helped us reach a broader constituency with regard to updates and goings on, however, considering the number of residents and businesses within our boundaries, participation has much room to improve.

2b Did you reach your minimal participation target?

We have not set a minimal participation target.

2c Did the project have a specific target public? If so, how did the use of electronic tools made a difference in reaching them?

The specific public is confined to those business and property owners within our geographic boundaries. Anyone is able to submit feedback, however, only those participants with home or work addresses within our boundaries are able to register. Registered feedback can then be compared to the opinion of the general public. This has been useful in decision making.

3 How did you involve the non-governmental associations/ activist groups? Where they able to use the electronic tool to participate at the same level then a citizen?

Community links to such organizations are listed on the site, but to date, there has been no proactive effort to involve private associations. There is nothing prohibiting an organization from participating, there is also nothing promoting it.

4 How did you ensure a dialogue between the experts (architects, urban planners, developers & others) and the citizens?

We have the option of hosting online forums and live discussions, but have not utilized these tools yet.

5 Did the use of electronic tools have an effect on the time management of the project?

I believe that by making as many public documents available online, we have saved a great deal of administrative time that would have otherwise been spent compiling information and responding to requests for public information.

6 What was the level of implication for the local government?

Not sure what you're looking for here...

7a Which method did you use to synthesize the comments received?

Comments received are first sorted into "District Residents" or "Greater Houston" based on their residence or business address. This allows us to determine, first, if the respondent pays taxes to the District and is an actual constituent voice or a greater Houston resident who does not play a role in funding the project or endeavor and, second, if the respondent will be directly impacted by the project construction or service and to what degree. We further break down the respondents as to whether they are an area resident, business owner, property owner or employee. A summary is then compiled of both types of respondents and presented to our board at our regular public board meetings for consideration.

7b Where you satisfied by the "quality" of the debate?

There has been no formal online debate to date. We have been satisfied with the quality of conflicting comments and points of view.

7c What kind of moderation did you apply to forums and/or chat rooms?

Forums are monitored by District staff, but unless inappropriate comments are posted, moderation is kept to a minimum.

8a Did you evaluate the demographic profile of the online participants? (If the answer to this question is NO, you can skip to question 9)

No, just their classification as District resident or non District resident.

8b What were the results?

8c How similar or different were they from a traditional participation?

9 How were the final results communicated to participants?

Poll results are visible immediately to participants.

10 Describe the main problems you encountered:

The only problem we have is encouraging broader participation.

11 Describe the positive results from this experience:

The most positive aspect of this service is that constituents can freely and conveniently voice their opinions and concerns. The feeling that one has a vehicle to speak to local government is extremely valuable in improving the quality of relationship between the entity and its constituency. It promotes transparency in decision making and notable activities which, in turn, plays a huge role in developing trust.

12 Do you plan to use the same tool for future urban development projects? Is there anything you would do differently?

Yes, the same tools will be ongoing throughout our projects and regular services. From here, we must make promotion of the tools available a priority in order to increase participation and achieve a more accurate sample representative of our District.

13 Would you consider you had a positive return on the investment?

Absolutely.

Annex II – Hamburg, Germany

Questionnaire

Executive Master in e-Governance, Ecole Polytechnique Federale de Lausanne
E-Participation for Urban Development Projects

By: Marianne Tremblay

1a Would you consider that the use of electronic tools helped you in reaching a higher number of your participants? **Yes. Measuring the increase participation compared to classic discussion involvement in comparable cases in terms of people is quite difficult because we are usually not counting the people involved. Even though I would say that there was probably an increase of round about 10-20% of active discussion involvement (not counting the passive awareness through media report).**

1b Did you reach your minimal participation target? **There was no target**

1c Did the project had a specific target public? If so, how did the use of electronic tools made a difference in reaching them? **No**

2 Did you use any specific marketing method to encourage citizens to use the electronic tool? **Press relations, eMails to opinion leaders/planning community**

3 How did you involve the non-governmental associations/ activist groups? Where they able to use the electronic tool to participate at the same level then a citizen? **Talks before the website started, invitation as participants in live discussions**

4 How did you ensure a dialogue between the experts (architects, urban planners, developers & others) and the citizens? **Live discussions in the Internet and offline**

5 Did the use of electronic had an effect on the time management of the project? **No.**

6 What was the level of implication for the local government?

7a Which method did you use to synthesize the comments received? **Evaluation report by TuTech GmbH.**

7b Where you satisfied by the “quality” of the debate? **Yes, mostly.**

7c What kind of moderation did you apply to forums and/or chat rooms?

8a Did you evaluate the demographic profile of the online participants? (If the answer to this question is NO, you can skip to question 9) **no.**

8b What where the results?

8c How similar or different where they from a traditional participation?

9 Describe the main problems you encountered: **the chosen time period of more than a month turned out to be too long to keep up public and professional interest at a high level.**

10 Do you plan to use the same tool for future urban development projects? Is there anything you would do differently? **Not at the moment.**

11 Describe the positive results from this experience:

There were 3 positive aspects in my opinion:

1. Generating a public and media awareness since such e-participation projects are quite new in urban planning.

2. The option to discuss questions that came up in the discussion quite detailed and from completely different point of views.

3. To get a written down instead of an oral discussion process which is completely public and transparent even until today.

11 Would you consider you had a positive return on the investment? **Overall yes.**

ANNEX III – Lausanne, Switzerland

Questionnaire

Executive Master in e-Governance, Ecole Polytechnique Federale de Lausanne
E-Participation for Urban Development Projects

Name: Philippe Anhorn

City/ Organization: OLA! Projet Métamorphose, Ville de Lausanne

Department: _____

By: Marianne Tremblay

1 Did you use any specific marketing method to encourage citizens to use the electronic tool? YES

2a Would you consider that the use of electronic tools helped you in reaching a higher number of your participants? NO

2b Did you reach your minimal participation target? NO

2c Did the project had a specific target public? NO If so, how did the use of electronic tools made a difference in reaching them?

3 How did you involve the non-governmental associations/ activist groups? THEY ARE INVITED TO PARTICIPATE ON LINE AS WELL AS PHYSICALLY Where they able to use the electronic tool to participate at the same level then a citizen? YES

4 How did you ensure a dialogue between the experts (architects, urban planners, developers & others) and the citizens? WE HAVE NOT REACHED THIS MOMENT. WE ARE RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF A BRAIN STORMING PHASIS IN ORDER TO COLLECT IDEAS, MAINLY FROM THE ORDINARY CITIZENS. DISCUSSION OF THESE IDEAS WITH EXPERTS SHOULD HAPPEN NEXT YEAR.

5 Did the use of electronic had an effect on the time management of the project? NO

6 What was the level of implication for the local government? STRONG

7a Which method did you use to synthesize the comments received? IDEAS MAPPING

7b Where you satisfied by the “quality” of the debate? YES

7c What kind of moderation did you apply to forums and/or chat rooms? FREE. MODERATORS DO VISIT THE WEBSITE TWICE A DAY AND REMOVE ONLY INAPPROPRIATE OR ILLEGAL MESSAGES

8a Did you evaluate the demographic profile of the online participants? (If the answer to this question is NO, you can skip to question 9) NO

8b What were the results?

8c How similar or different were they from a traditional participation?

9 How were the final results communicated to participants? WE ARE NOT FINISHED YET.

10 Describe the main problems you encountered: AT THIS TIME, WE FACE ONLY TECHNICAL PROBLEMS

11 Describe the positive results from this experience: NOT EVALUATED YET

12 Do you plan to use the same tool for future urban development projects? NO URBAN PROJECTS WITHOUT E-PARTICIPATION Is there anything you would do differently? SECURE THE TECHNICAL ASPECTS

13 Would you consider you had a positive return on the investment? NO. THIS IS THE FIRST OCCURRENCE OF E-PARTICIPATION IN THIS AREA. THERE MUST BE ONE OR TWO MORE BEFORE IT BECOMES A MUST.

Questionnaire

Executive Master in e-Governance, Ecole Polytechnique Federale de Lausanne
E-Participation for Urban Development Projects

Name: Christian RUFFIEUX
City/ Organization: City of Lausanne
Department: Organisation and IT Dept,

By: Marianne Tremblay

1 Did you use any specific marketing method to encourage citizens to use the electronic tool?

Communication has been made using traditional medias, like papers, based on a series of small but creative events (pls refer to http://ola.lausanne.ch/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=76&Itemid=128)

2a Would you consider that the use of electronic tools helped you in reaching a higher number of your participants?

For the time being, the answer is NO

2b Did you reach your minimal participation target?

Certainly not ! but pls. consider first the answer of Mrs Krebs who leads the project.

2c Did the project had a specific target public?

NO

If so, how did the use of electronic tools made a difference in reaching them?

3 How did you involve the non-governmental associations/ activist groups?

A) I don't know, B) I would say the 'ola' consortium which organize the civil participation is including some persons known as 'activists'

Where they able to use the electronic tool to participate at the same level then a citizen?

A) NO, only persons were solicited, not NGO. B) but there was no verification of identity and anybody was able to participate, so NGO had some way to express their ideas.

4 How did you ensure a dialogue between the experts (architects, urban planners, developers & others) and the citizens?

Pls consider answer of M Anhorn

5 Did the use of electronic had an effect on the time management of the project?

NO

6 What was the level of implication for the local government?

High level of Attention and visible sponsorship

7a Which method did you use to synthesize the comments received?

See answer of M Anhorn

7b Where you satisfied by the “quality” of the debate?

See answer of M Anhorn

7c What kind of moderation did you apply to forums and/or chat rooms?

See answer of M Anhorn

8a Did you evaluate the demographic profile of the online participants? (If the answer to this question is NO, you can skip to question 9)

See answer of M Anhorn

8b What where the results?

See answer of M Anhorn

8c How similar or different where they from a traditional participation?

See answer of M Anhorn

9 How were the final results communicated to participants?

Project is running; See answer of M Anhorn

10 Describe the main problems you encountered:

For what regards eParticipation:

- lack of time between first information coming into the IT dept.,
- lack of skilled resources, who were able to implement, and manage technically the chosen platform
- lack of skilled resources, who were able to implement, expand and manage functionally the chosen platform

11 Describe the positive results from this experience:

Internal education

Demo effect; demystify the electronic participation

12 Do you plan to use the same tool for future urban development projects?

Certainly for what regards the IT dept

Is there anything you would do differently?

Increase the promotion of the platform, inform directly the inhabitants without needs of traditional medias

13 Would you consider you had a positive return on the investment?

In the time being... for this project... considering the urban project it has to serve... certainly not. But the ‘project’ has only a small cost.

ANNEX IV – Auckland, New Zealand

Questionnaire

Executive Master in e-Governance, Ecole Polytechnique Federale de Lausanne
E-Participation for Urban Development Projects

Name: Tania Loveridge
City/ Organization: Auckland City Council, Auckland New Zealand
Department: CBD Projects

By: Marianne Tremblay

These responses are related to public consultation undertaken on

- a number of CBD streetscape and open spaces projects that fall within the Auckland's CBD Into the future strategy
- And the CBD into the future strategy and action plan, the overarching strategic framework that gives direction to the development of the CBD.

The use of the internet was generally consistent across these projects, and this included website material that outlines the project with an electronic feedback form.

Auckland City Council has more recently introduced a listening post on the Auckland City website which encourages people to find out more
<http://www.aucklandcity.govt.nz/council/members/say/listeningpost.asp>

There are other large projects operating in council that may also have used alternative methods. You might want to let us know if you want more than one case study.

1 Did you use any specific marketing method to encourage citizens to use the electronic tool?

Our communications tactics used to encourage the public to participate in public consultation includes a number of media, this includes publication via:

- *Our local council newspaper, City Scene*
- *Publication of advertisements in local papers*
- *Signage within the location of the sites being developed (for streetscape projects)*
- *Direct mailing to affected stakeholders*
- *Distribution of flyers*
- *And e-newsletters.*

All communications indicate that public can participate in public consultation by completing feedback forms that can either be posted or via the internet, as well as talking direct with project leaders. Depending on the project being undertaken facilitated workshops are also held.

The opportunity to participate via the website is clearly communicated in all communications/marketing material.

A recent project falling under the project, solicited web only based feedback on the draft concept design in addition to the standard forms or web based feedback. This was undertaken by a marketing company.

2a Would you consider that the use of electronic tools helped you in reaching a higher number of your participants?

Yes. It certainly broadened the audience based to receive the information giving them the opportunity to participate. There is still generally more feedback received by post than electronic means still.

2b Did you reach your minimal participation target?

There are no minimal targets set, but yes generally.

2c Did the project had a specific target public? If so, how did the use of electronic tools made a difference in reaching them?

The public are included as a targeted audience for our project. Generally our electronic tool is the e-newsletter which requires people to sign up to received, so once they are signed up they will be informed, it is also advertised on the front page of our Auckland City Council website under a 'have your say' banner. It is hard to say whether this will have attracted new members of the public to participate. The more traditional forms of media are likely to achieve this (free council newspaper, signage, media releases picked up by media).

3 How did you involve the non-governmental associations/ activist groups? Where they able to use the electronic tool to participate at the same level then a citizen?

As outlined above, the electronic tool is simply a feedback form and we offer everyone the opportunity to respond in that way.

4 How did you ensure a dialogue between the experts (architects, urban planners, developers & others) and the citizens?

Where dialogue is necessary for a project w undertake workshop situations rather than electronic based debate.

5 Did the use of electronic had an effect on the time management of the project?

NA

6 What was the level of implication for the local government?

NA

7a Which method did you use to synthesize the comments received?

We manually collate the information, using excel to develop themes collected during the consultation.

7b Where you satisfied by the “quality” of the debate?

Yes though debate is perhaps not the best word to describe it. We provide opportunities for feedback rather than a bottom up, charrette situation where the public and stakeholders are participating from the start of a project. It's at an inform & involve level of consultation on the IAP2 consultation spectrum.

7c What kind of moderation did you apply to forums and/or chat rooms?

NA

8a Did you evaluate the demographic profile of the online participants? (If the answer to this question is NO, you can skip to question 9)

No

8b What were the results?

8c How similar or different were they from a traditional participation?

9 How were the final results communicated to participants?

The final results – how we took into consideration their feedback was communication back to participants via a number of different media including publication on website.

10 Describe the main problems you encountered:

No problems with any tools used. Can you clarify what you want with regards to the question. In terms of overall consultation issues

- *low return of feedback, and not a huge amount of interest from the public on these type of projects.*
- *The biggest challenge is making sure that people are aware that the project is going ahead and given the opportunity to participate.*

11 Describe the positive results from this experience:

12 Do you plan to use the same tool for future urban development projects? Is there anything you would do differently?

We might look at how to increase the use of electronic media as appropriate.

13 Would you consider you had a positive return on the investment?

Yes

ANNEX V – Oxford, United Kingdom

Questionnaire

Executive Master in e-Governance, Ecole Polytechnique Federale de Lausanne
E-Participation for Urban Development Projects

Name: Shey Cobley

City/ Organization: Oxford City Council

Department: Policy Performance and Communication

By: Marianne Tremblay

1 Did you use any specific marketing method to encourage citizens to use the electronic tool?

There was very limited marketing. We attended local community meetings giving presentations. Some posters were created to put on community notice boards.

2a Would you consider that the use of electronic tools helped you in reaching a higher number of your participants?

I am not sure if we reached a higher number. My feeling is that we made it easier for people who were already interested to participate.

2b Did you reach your minimal participation target?

Yes

2c Did the project had a specific target public? If so, how did the use of electronic tools made a difference in reaching them?

We were trying to target residents in a area rather than a specific type of resident.

3 How did you involve the non-governmental associations/ activist groups? Where they able to use the electronic tool to participate at the same level then a citizen?

We went to community meetings in order to involve interested groups. Everyone was able to participate as an individual at the same level. There was no mechanism for group representation.

4 How did you ensure a dialogue between the experts (architects, urban planners, developers & others) and the citizens?

5 Did the use of electronic had an effect on the time management of the project?

No, it was just another tool for gaining opinions.

6 What was the level of implication for the local government?

7a Which method did you use to synthesize the comments received?

7b Were you satisfied by the “quality” of the debate?

The debate was dominated by a couple of more vocal individuals which had to be carefully managed.

7c What kind of moderation did you apply to forums and/or chat rooms?

We use post-moderation of comments. If participants break the rules then there is a mechanism to place them on pre-moderation in order to double check their comments.

8a Did you evaluate the demographic profile of the online participants? (If the answer to this question is NO, you can skip to question 9)

No

8b What were the results?

8c How similar or different were they from a traditional participation?

9 How were the final results communicated to participants?

Through the council website.

10 Describe the main problems you encountered:

The main problem with a discussion forum is that the discussions are unstructured so conversations can easily go off track into areas that are not of interest.

11 Describe the positive results from this experience:

While it is difficult sometimes to direct the forum which can be problematic it can also be a benefit as you uncover issues and concerns that you may not be aware of.

12 Do you plan to use the same tool for future urban development projects? Is there anything you would do differently?

We plan to use discussion forums for this and other topics. In the future it may be beneficial to set more focused questions to discuss in order to keep things on track.

13 Would you consider you had a positive return on the investment?

The forum was free to set up in monetary terms. There was a time resource which we have more than recovered.